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Classified By: WHA/USOAS J. ROBERT MANZANARES

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: This message is a regular report regarding current Organization of American States (OAS) issues that may be of interest to overseas posts and domestic agencies. The purpose of these roundup cables is to inform posts of otherwise unreported developments in the inter-American system. Info addressees include posts whose countries maintain observer status at the OAS and that often provide financial or other support for OAS initiatives. This edition includes, among other issues: an announcement of the 2008 General Assembly theme; upcoming OAS meetings; a visit by Secretary General Insulza to Bolivia; Insulza comments on the

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resignation of Fidel Castro; a commemoration of the Ottawa Convention; a UN regional report on poverty alleviation; OAS pressure on Haiti regarding delayed Senate elections; progress on OAS partnership with civil society; a report on OAS observation of Paraguay's Colorado primary; a donor briefing on upcoming electoral observation missions; off-site events on development and firearms trafficking; recent inflammatory comments by Nicaragua; and continued rudderless negotiations on discrimination and indigenous rights. End Summary.

//COLOMBIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ARAUJO PRESENTS THEME OF 2008 OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY//

[1](#)2. (U) At the OAS Permanent Council on February 8, Foreign Minister of Colombia Fernando Araujo presented Medellin as the site and "Youth and Democratic Values" as the theme of the June 1-3 OAS General Assembly. He was accompanied by Mayor of Medellin Alonso Salazar Jaramillo. Citing mandates from the Inter-American Democratic Charter, Araujo emphasized that elections alone are not sufficient for democracy, but that education, integral development, jobs, and access to credit - key to enlisting youth - are needed for democratic governance to succeed. Araujo heralded the February 4 anti-FARC marches in Colombia and throughout the world as showing that youth are indeed willing to take an activist role, saying the march was entirely a grass-roots initiative.

[1](#)3. (U) Araujo also provided a strong defense of President Uribe's policies, saying his emphasis on security, human rights, investor confidence, and social development have brought about a transformation in Colombia. Other Permanent Representatives welcomed the Colombian presentation, and U.S. Interim Permanent Representative J. Robert Manzanares took

the floor to quote the Secretary's recent praise of Medellin (and Colombia) and to emphasize the importance of education for democracy. Subsequently, OAS delegations began considering the draft "Declaration of Medellin" at meetings of the Agenda Subcommittee chaired by Colombian PermRep Amb. Ospina.

//UPCOMING OAS MEETINGS//

¶4. (U) Information on these meetings is usually available on the OAS website; using Google to search for the meeting is often the quickest route.

- Energy for Sustainable Development: Washington, DC; March 3; USOAS POC) Jean Clark
- Natural Disaster Reductions and Risk Management: Caracas, Venezuela; March 26) 27; USOAS POC) Sarah Hankins
- Port Security: Punta Cana, DR; April 7) 10; USOAS POC) Jean Clark
- Improving Access to Safe Drinking Water and Basic Sanitation: Caracas, Venezuela; April 10) 11; USOAS POC) Jean Clark

//SECRETARY GENERAL INSULZA DISCUSSES VISIT TO BOLIVIA//

¶5. (C) In a January 28 meeting with U.S. Interim PermRep Manzanarez, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza indicated that he had had a good meeting with Bolivian President Evo Morales during his January 25-26 visit to that country, and had emphasized to Morales that no member of the international community, including the USG, was attempting to destabilize his government. Insulza described the draft constitution as a "bad document," but expressed the view that it did not violate the Inter-American Democratic Charter, despite opposition concerns about the flawed process that led to the draft document. Insulza said it was unclear when there would be a referendum on the draft constitution and expressed skepticism that there would ever be a referendum on Morales' leadership and the prefects. However, Insulza confirmed that the OAS planned to observe any referendum that did go forward. Insulza also noted the Bolivian Government's concern regarding the status of both ATPDA and MCC eligibility. Subsequently, USOAS learned that OAS Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs Dante Caputo and Director of

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Electoral Observation and Cooperation Pablo Gutierrez plan to travel to La Paz.

//PROPOSED DATES AND THEME OF SECOND OAS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MINISTERIAL//

¶6. (U) On February 11-12, the first working group meeting in advance of the OAS Meeting of Ministers and Highest-Authorities of Science and technology was held in Mexico City. A proposal for the Ministerial to be held at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 27)28, preceded by a civil society meeting on October 26, will be formally presented soon. The theme for the Ministerial will likely be "Science, Technology, and Innovation as Instruments for Human Prosperity." To link the Ministerial to the 2009 Summit of the Americas, subtopics will likely include sustainable development, energy security, governance, and competitiveness.

//NICARAGUAN PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE BLASTS UNITED STATES IN SANDINO COMMEMORATION//

¶7. (U) Nicaraguan PermRep Amb. Denis Moncada used the 67th anniversary of the death of Augusto Cesar Sandino to launch a lengthy attack on the United States at a February 20 meeting of the Permanent Council. He recited U.S. interventions in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Latin America from the mid 19th century through the 1980s. The Venezuelan, Bolivian, and (surprisingly) Uruguayan delegations expressed strong support for Nicaragua's presentation, with Uruguayan PermRep Amb. Maria del Lujan Flores lauding Nicaragua's long struggle against foreign domination and observing that Sandino's cause was taken up by "later generations of Nicaraguan idealists"

culminating in the Sandinista victory in 1979. No other delegations commented on the Nicaraguan presentation, and USOAS did not respond.

//SECRETARY GENERAL ISSUES PRESS RELEASE ON CASTRO
RESIGNATION//

¶18. (U) Traveling on an official visit to Mexico on February 19, Insulza stated "that decision is no small matter given the Cuban leader's importance in his country and in the Latin American region for almost five decades." While failing to make any reference to the OAS Charter or the Inter-American Democratic Charter, Insulza expressed hope that in Cuba "se produzcan cambios que permitan la plena incorporacion de esta Nacion hermana, al seno de nuestra Organizacion." He added that "it should fall to Cubans themselves, through free and peaceful dialogue and without external interference, to find the most appropriate path to the wellbeing of the people." The release notes that the current Cuban government was suspended at the Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in January 1962.

//OAS CELEBRATES MINE-BAN TREATY, U.S. SINGLED OUT AS
NON-SIGNATORY AND DONOR//

¶19. (U) During a January 30 commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Ottawa Convention to eliminate anti-personnel mines) to which the United States is not a signatory - Panamanian PermRep Amb. Aristides Royo noted that "33 of the 34 OAS member states" are signatories. Bolivian PermRep Amb. Reynaldo Cuadros condemned the use of landmines by state actors as well as illegal groups, and Argentine PermRep Amb. Rodolfo Gil urged adoption of Ottawa by non-states party. Nicaragua stated that industrialized countries produce landmines and require "consciousness-raising," but also cited the U.S. as a major donor to Nicaragua's demining efforts. USOAS informed the Permanent Council that the USG is one of the largest donors to demining efforts in the Americas and joined Colombia in urging the Council to promptly adopt a resolution condemning landmine use by illegal armed groups in Colombia, an effort that has been stymied by Argentina and Venezuela.

//UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION PRESENTS REGIONAL REPORT ON
POVERTY ALLEVIATION//

¶10. (U) Executive Director of the UN Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor Naresh Singh delivered a regional report to the OAS Permanent Council on January 30 regarding the Commission's efforts to expand economic opportunity, universalize access to legal recourse, and strengthen respect for property rights. The Commission is hosted by UNDP, and was launched in 2005 by a group of developing and industrialized countries; Canada and Guatemala are the founding countries from the Americas. Peru and Costa Rica welcomed the report and asked the OAS to consider further the issue of possible OAS-Commission cooperation. USOAS underscored the positive U.S. agenda in combating poverty and advancing social justice in the Americas. Venezuela raised concerns that the usage in OAS and UN fora of the word "empowerment" hinders direct state action to fight poverty; Nicaragua stated that the poor should be more deeply involved in "direct" and "popular" decision-making through constitutional means.

//HAITIAN AMBASSADOR TO OAS CRITICIZES PREVAL ON ELECTIONS//

¶11. (SBU) On January 31, Haitian OAS Ambassador Duly Brutus informed the Group of Friends of the SYG on Haiti) including several OAS member states, international financial institutions, and EU countries) that he was gravely concerned over the delayed Senate elections, and said he regularly urged President Preval to hold them as soon as possible. This is the first time Brutus has publicly stated his position, though he has shared it with USOAS informally several times since elections were postponed. OAS Assistant Secretary Albert Ramdin organized a February 14-17

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ambassador-level visit to Haiti, in which we participated, to review the status of OAS civil registry and electoral council projects as well as meet with high level officials.

//OAS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OFF-SITE//

¶12. (U) On February 5, El Salvador PermRep Amb. Abigail Castro de Perez hosted an off-site meeting for all 34 OAS member states to discuss the Organization's role in the area of development and whether it is appropriately responding to its members' needs. Secretary General Insulza and ASYG Ramdin participated in the meeting and presented a partial reorganization plan of the Inter-American Council of Integral Development (CIDI), the part of the OAS that handles education & culture; science & technology; trade & tourism; sustainable development; social development & employment. Member states agreed that there is a need to focus development priorities to attract external funds from observer states and the private sector. Consensus was reached for greater collaboration between the OAS and other international organizations, including the Inter-American Development Bank. Since Canada is no longer participating in the OAS development fund, delegations were particularly pleased to hear that the United States would continue contributing to the fund. Members agreed to continue discussion in ongoing meetings of the Permanent Executive Committee of CIDI.

//OAS MOVES FORWARD ON MARCH 2008 "CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP WEEK"//

¶13. (U) Despite numerous objections by Venezuela and Nicaragua, on February 8 the OAS Civil Society committee approved the agenda for a March 14 Special Permanent Council meeting with civil society, as mandated by a resolution presented by the United States at last year's OASGA in Panama. In addition, the committee forwarded to the Permanent Council four applications from Venezuelan NGOs seeking to participate in OAS activities. Venezuela argues that these NGOs, which have received NED/IRI/NDI funding, intend to overthrow the Chavez government. Debate will continue at the Permanent Council regarding these applications.

¶14. (U) In conjunction with a number of other NGO-focused events during the week of March 10-14, the Permanent Council will hold two special meetings to discuss best practices and growing challenges faced by NGOs in the Americas. The OAS Summits Secretariat will also host its annual pre-OAS General Assembly roundtable with civil society during the week of March 10-14, focused on the GA theme of "Youth and Democratic Values." The U.S. and Canada are supporting these events through financial contributions.

//OAS REPORTS ON COLORADO PRIMARY ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION IN PARAGUAY//

¶15. (SBU) On February 13, Pablo Gutierrez of the OAS Political Secretariat presented his report to the Permanent Council on the OAS electoral observation mission (EOM) that monitored the December 16 Colorado primary. Gutierrez, who led the Paraguay EOM, reported that there were no serious problems related to the primary and concluded that the vote followed the "laws and norms applicable to this type of election." He noted, however, that the results were not finalized by the official date established by the Colorado party and recommended that oversight of Paraguayan primaries be transferred from the parties to a "higher electoral body." USOAS urged a more thorough EOM for the Paraguayan national elections in April, noting that the EOM to Paraguay had not spent enough time on the ground to offer a definitive report on the conduct of the primary. Paraguayan PermRep Amb. Manuel Caceres Cardoso thanked the OAS for carrying out the EOM, and the USG and Canada for funding the mission. He confirmed that the OAS has been invited to monitor the national elections in April 2008.

//OAS BRIEFS DONORS ON UPCOMING ELECTORAL OBSERVATION
MISSIONS//

¶16. (SBU) Pablo Gutierrez of the Secretariat for Political Affairs briefed USOAS, Canada, and Spain (the three leading donors for EOMs) on February 14 regarding OAS plans for EOMs in 2008. Gutierrez said the OAS has been invited to monitor elections in Paraguay (April), the Dominican Republic (May), Nicaragua (November municipal elections), and Grenada, as well as Ecuador's eventual constitutional referendum. El Salvador asked the OAS to arrive in Fall 2008 to help organize a comprehensive mission for the 2009 elections.

¶17. (SBU) Bolivian officials indicated their desire for the OAS to monitor any referenda organized this year. USOAS thanked Gutierrez for providing detailed EOM plans for 2008 and expressed USG interest in helping fund the EOMs but pressed for the rapid release of the many pending EOM reports for 2006 and 2007 and stringent OAS adherence to international EOM principles.

//BOLIVIA CHAMPIONS COCA USE DURING PRESENTATION OF ANTI-DRUG
REPORTS//

¶18. (SBU) On February 13, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) distributed this year's Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) reports, which are the result of a peer-review process and contain recommendations for each member state. A Bolivian representative protested the MEM's "unfair criticism" of Bolivia's coca cultivation, citing a hemispheric "misunderstanding" of the difference between cocaine and coca) the latter, he said, is a key element of indigenous Bolivian culture. He further complained of an "arbitrary distinction" that made coca illegal while tobacco and amphetamines were legal and said this penalized poor countries. According to the representative, in 2006 coca eradication in Bolivia resulted in over 150 deaths. He urged that further eradication of the coca plant be strictly voluntary.

//MEXICO CALLS ON UNITED STATES TO RATIFY FIREARMS
TRAFFICKING CONVENTION AT CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTY//

¶19. (U) At the February 20 opening ceremony of the Second Conference of States Party to the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA), OAS SYG Insulza and Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa called on the seven remaining OAS member state signatories to ratify the Convention. On three later occasions, the Mexican delegation took the plenary floor to explicitly call on the United States to ratify the convention, citing the issue's "utmost importance." The U.S. delegation expressed its support for the Convention's role in addressing the threat of illicit trafficking in firearms, and provided information on related U.S. assistance programs.

//THIS YEAR'S OAS DISCRIMINATION CONVENTION NEGOTIATIONS OFF
TO ROCKY START//

¶20. (SBU) At the first 2008 negotiation of the Inter-American Convention against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance on February 13, even the "streamlined" document that Brazil drafted with input from the OAS Secretariat could not quiet concerns that the document continues to be far too broad. This has been the U.S. position since negotiations began. Canada took the lead in calling for a reduction in number of prohibited bases of discrimination in the text. Honduras and Costa Rica echoed this, marking the first time any of the Latin American group of countries has done so. Canada has told us that if their "final push" to improve the text fails, they will cease active negotiation; Costa Rica said privately that they were considering the same. The United States, in attendance but not sitting in the chair per interagency understanding, is currently the only member state not participating in negotiations.

¶21. (SBU) A February 22 second round of negotiations addressed definition of terms, scope of application, and protected rights. Delegations continued to clash over the scope of the treaty, with Canada attempting to limit the text to racial discrimination and Mexico proposing to remove "racism" from the title in order to further broaden it. Canada received no support for its repeated requests to delete entire paragraphs on the grounds that they were broad and incapable of implementation. Contacts at Canada's DFAIT are willing to work with the U.S. on a joint public diplomacy event at the OAS highlighting Canadian and U.S. implementation of the CERD.

//FRUSTRATION APPARENT IN DISCUSSION OF INDIGENOUS RIGHTS NEGOTIATION PROCESS//

¶22. (SBU) The first round of formal negotiations in 2008 to draft an Inter-American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP) will take place April 14-18 in Washington. The U.S. will seek to avoid line-by-line debate and focus instead on a public diplomacy event. To date, the DRIP working group, chaired by Bolivian PermRep Amb. Reynaldo Cuadros, has met three times in 2008 and continues to stumble along in a rudderless fashion.

¶23. (SBU) In response to Cuadros' repeated urgings in the working group and at the Permanent Council that member states submit long-overdue responses to the outcome document of the Reflection Session held November 26-28, several countries publicly decried the lack of progress on the draft Declaration while some privately expressed skepticism about the direction of DRIP negotiations. In particular, Mexico told USOAS that they would respond to Bolivia's call for comments, but viewed it as a repetitious waste of time. Panama and other delegations charged that the OAS should be "ashamed" of 10 years of negotiations without consensus, and Nicaragua called the lagging DRIP negotiations an "existential crisis" at the OAS. USOAS continues to oppose use of the UN DRIP as a reference or baseline for the OAS text, while urging broader discussion of concrete member state actions to improve the lives of indigenous in the hemisphere.

//USOAS LAYS GROUNDWORK FOR NEXT PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL LAW CONFERENCE//

¶24. (U) USOAS and L/PIL attended a conference in Tegucigalpa on February 28 and 29 on the subject of registries for secured transactions in CAFTA countries. The OAS General Assembly has mandated that the next Inter-American Conference on Private International Law (CIDIP-VII) devise a model registry for possible adoption by OAS member states. CIDIP-VI devised a model law on secured transactions that is being used as the basis for laws adopted or under consideration in Central American countries as they gear up for CAFTA.

¶25. (U) Registries remain almost non-existent in the region. When enacted, they would allow lenders quick and reliable information on the existence of liens on property put up as collateral by borrowers. Good laws on secured transactions and properly instituted registries would increase the availability of credit to businesses and individuals in emerging economies, grow economies and create jobs.

¶26. (U) The Conference was sponsored by the Millennium Challenge Account) Honduras, the Association of Honduran Banking Institutions, and the National Law Center for Inter-American Free Trade, based in Tucson, Arizona.
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